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THE QUALITY OF THOROUGHNESS IN NURSES' WORK *

By ISABEL HAMPTON ROBB

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A LITTLE over thirteen years ago it was my privilege to greet for the first time a Baltimore audience and to become for a few years a resident of Baltimore City. And, like all others who have once lived within her borders or who have been in any way a part of the Johns Hopkins Hospital or University, I have always been eager to seize any opportunity that might afford itself of revisiting the place that has been endeared to me by work and association. So when Dr. Hurd did me the honor to ask me to address the graduates of to-day, the pleasant anticipation of finding myself once more surrounded by Johns Hopkins nurses, past, present, and future, and of being again in touch with Baltimore, was not to be withstood. I am only too well aware of the fact that the retrospect and forecast I may hold before you to-day may not contain the full measure of inspiration and wise counsel that you may have hoped for, nor delight you with the happy phrasing that might have been offered you by many others who would gladly have accepted the honor of addressing you in my place; nevertheless, I feel assured that no one could be found who is more profoundly interested than myself in your individual interests and work, or who could draw more closely to you in those mutual professional ties and common interests into which you are about to enter.

At that first gathering the Johns Hopkins nurse was conspicuous by her absence. She was still in the future; her place was still to be made in the hospital and household; her history page was still fair and unwritten. But two years later the first class of graduates stood, where you now stand, prepared to leave their hospital and to go forth to form a new factor in the life of this city, to become part of it for better or worse; and each year since a fresh class has been added to the first, until to-day our *alumnæ* form a goodly host. How they have sped we of the household, who have watched their individual lives anxiously, know full well. The Johns Hopkins nurse has not only become a familiar presence in many homes both of the needy and of the well-to-do of this city, but to various positions in other cities and countries she has also carried the

* An address to the graduating class at the Johns Hopkins Hospital Training-School for Nurses, May 28, 1903. From the *Johns Hopkins Bulletin*.

well-known name of her hospital and school, doing both, we trust, honor and credit.

For the graduate of to-day that first class must need have a special interest, for early in its formation there came into its ranks one who was destined to become, a few years later, the chief executive of your school. From probationer to junior, from grade to grade, she worked her way up until there was no form of nursing within her reach she had not done, no nursing position the hospital had to offer she had not held. Thus year by year she went on with indomitable perseverance, unconsciously training mind and hands, so that when the time came there was no need for the hospital authorities to look beyond their own graduates for a principal for their school for nurses, since they had readily to hand one who was in every way capable of assuming a position of responsibility and trust equalled by few and excelled by none open to members of your profession. And it should be a matter of no small pride and pleasure to all Johns Hopkins nurses that with the exception of the first few years they have held within their own hands the welfare of the nursing department of their own hospital, and at the same time have contributed superintendents for similar positions to other hospitals in a greater proportion for the length of years it has been in existence than perhaps any other school in the country.

But if I recall these facts as affording a sufficient proof of the standard that your school has maintained, if I tell you that the eyes of the hospital world are ever watching with keen interest the progress made by this school, and that the superintendent of your school is an authority on nursing affairs, it is not that you may be puffed up or satisfied with yourselves, but rather realize the burden of the responsibility laid upon you, and that when you have done your best you may say with all humility, "We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do," and strive to make the future stand for better work than the past.

There is, perhaps, no other outside of Miss Nutting's immediate co-workers who can be so well aware as myself of the steady progress made by this school; while carrying on its every-day work, she has lost no opportunity for its advancement and betterment, and, leaving unmentioned for the moment the many minor but important changes and improvements she has made, it is a great satisfaction to feel that she should have been among the first to inaugurate successfully the three-years' course of study, with an eight-hours' daily system of practical work, which marks one of the greatest advances in training-school methods. Her last great achievement has been the establishment of a preliminary course of instruction for probationers, the great need for which has given

me a subject ready to hand—a subject that one could readily discourse upon under many and various titles, but to-day permit me to speak of it in its relation to “The Quality of Thoroughness in Nurses’ Work.”

That there is a deep and widespread dissatisfaction felt at the lack of thoroughness in much of the work to-day, and that this deficiency is confined to no particular class of workers and to no particular degree of service, we are all aware. Nevertheless, although few of us escape the discomfort and annoyance attending upon it in some shape or form at one time or another, we find ourselves still able to endure it with a certain amount of patience and equanimity so long as it partakes of the impersonal; but once let it become personal in character, once let it enter the privacy of the home, and we are keenly sensitive and alive to defects in work of any kind and give expression to our feelings and opinions in no uncertain tones. But what worker is brought into more personal and intimate relationship with those with whom she has to deal than the trained nurse? All of us have heard a portion of the public sentimentalize and idealize the nurse with such fulsome flattery that we have sometimes prayed that we might be saved from our friends. On the other hand, we hear daily criticisms upon her many shortcomings, and so often are these latter sounded in the ears of the medical practitioner, whose coworker she is, that he is impelled to look for some favorable opportunity to appease his patients by laying all sorts of injunctions upon the nurse’s manners and morals, and finds it when making the annual address to the graduating class. And despite the fact that these recommendations have been made, almost without exception, in the kindest spirit, how often have we, who have had much to do with the making of nurses, been deeply embarrassed that such advice should be deemed necessary, inasmuch as we have felt that if such faults lay wholly and entirely within the guild of nurses, we must in common honesty refrain from adding one more member to the list. Graduates of the Johns Hopkins have been favored beyond their kind in having in years gone by listened in most part to addresses that were an inspiration to better deeds and higher ideals in beginning their professional career. Although you too have been besought upon one or two notable occasions to enter upon your duties in the full consciousness of guilt of such sins and frailties, if you possessed them, and had not battled against them and overcome them long before reaching graduation day, the address of warning would have availed you but little. Do not let me be misunderstood. I am not saying that nurses are perfect. What I wish to point out is that it is more than possible that the glaring imperfections of the trained nurse—and she has many—are not in the main attributable to any lack of training in her profession, but are shared by her with her

fellows in other walks of life and are the result of imperfect education—and here I use the word education in the broadest sense of the term. In other words, inefficiency, superficiality, and lack of thoroughness belong not to the graduate nurse alone, but are the common property of the modern woman and belong to the average American household.

In the statement that there is a sad lack of thoroughness in the average woman of to-day I need only refer to training-school statistics to bear me out. From one school in twelve months twelve hundred letters of information are sent out and some one hundred and seventy-five formal applications are received. Furthermore, from this number only fifty candidates are selected, and, nevertheless, from this restricted number of women chosen at least eight or ten are dropped generally for inefficiency and lack of education. If then only forty women out of a total of one hundred and seventy-five applicants are considered worthy of admission to the school, what is the probable standard of education among the other one hundred and thirty-five, not to mention the many women who do not make formal application because refusal is certain? Surely the superintendents of training-schools are justified in feeling that the unthinking part of the public would have them "make bricks without straw."

But the fact that the qualifications of these selected few are not, and never have been, considered by superintendents of training-schools of the first order for the making of nurses is being proved rather by deeds than by words, and this dissatisfaction has found its expression in the establishment of a preliminary course of training, which is being tried in varying degrees in schools of this country and Great Britain, and which has been put on a more thorough and comprehensive basis in the Johns Hopkins than elsewhere. This extra course has been made compulsory before a woman can begin her technical training in nursing, in the hope of overcoming to some extent a very general ignorance and helplessness in a branch of knowledge that for century upon century has been supposed to be woman's chief stronghold—that of household economics. As Miss Nutting has said, "In pursuance of the belief that it is essential for the nurse to have a wide and thorough acquaintance with the subjects of foods and dietetics and a full knowledge of the work of the household, with careful training in its various branches, a comparatively large portion of time is devoted to this subject;" and in addition to this special course in household economics some training-schools are even advocating and arranging for a course in general literature and in practice in reading aloud, all subjects outside of the direct work of teaching nursing. No doubt many of you might think that the above statement cannot apply to all classes of women, but as a matter of fact actual

experience has amply proved that the woman of wealth, the well-to-do woman, and the college student are equally deficient in manual dexterity, so essential to good nursing, and are as ignorant of the underlying principles of household affairs as is the woman who has never had an opportunity to develop her mental powers and has labored all her days with her hands. It can be scarcely appreciated how deficient women are in the practical knowledge of the affairs of the house until one is brought face to face with such ignorance in some such place as a training-school for nurses, where it becomes one of the fundamental requirements. As an example, I have had instructors tell me that not one woman in ten upon first entering the diet-school knows how to make a cup of tea properly, few could break an egg deftly enough to separate the yolk from the white, while the qualities of accuracy, precision, and a fine finish are invariably absent. The woman who would be a success as a nurse, or, in fact, in anything, who would possess the quality of thoroughness in its fullest sense, no matter what kind of work she undertakes, needs the combined qualities of a trained mind, capable hands and body—and all must be dominated by the soul. Certainly no form of education can make for thoroughness or can fully fit for the business of life that does not recognize an equal training in this great trinity—mind, body, and soul.

But when and where should a woman receive such a preparation? Surely not during a six-months' preliminary course in a training-school for nurses, but rather during the sixteen years preceding the time she is of an age to take up the work she intends to make the chief occupation of her life. To quote the words of another, "The hospital is the place par excellence to teach the art of nursing and to practise the science, but it is not the best place, or even a good place, to teach the accessories. Moreover, in assuming the burden of this higher education we are unwisely making ourselves responsible for all the defects and deficiencies in the training of nurses and bearing the criticism against the profession, aimed for the most part not against her nursing education, but the accessories." If, then, this education is to begin with our childhood, where and how should it be given? Naturally, in the school and at home. But, as Miss Nutting has said, "Were it possible to place the requirements of admission at such a point as would insure in our pupils a definite knowledge of certain prescribed subjects before entrance to the schools of nursing, it is manifest that our work of education might be greatly facilitated." That such a course under present conditions is not practicable is only too evident. Any scheme for such preparatory instruction should include, first, a thorough practical training in the care of the household and a knowledge of the properties of foods. Now at

present there exists no school of instruction where a candidate could go to prepare herself fitly in these subjects for entrance to the hospital school for nursing. To be sure, the Drexel Institute in Philadelphia, the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, the School of Housekeeping in Boston, and some others cover the ground of the domestic sciences admirably, and upon them we draw for our instructors in these branches. But the instruction in these institutions is largely occupied with the subject of foods and cookery, important essentials, indeed, but which do not include all that is meant when we say that a pupil should have a knowledge of housekeeping before entering the hospital wards for her training as a nurse. Unfortunately, this practical handling of the things and affairs of the home is taught in no schools and in but few homes at the present day, and, as Spencer has said, "That which our school course leaves almost entirely out, we thus find to be that which most nearly concerns the business of life."

The subject of the home in relation to the question of a three-fold education has of late years been well studied by well-qualified investigators, who have pointed out clearly and emphatically the shortcomings of the present day in this connection, and have sought for and recommended various remedies through the application of which we may hope to arrive at a better state of affairs; but up to the present time the ground has hardly been broken and no great general advance has been made. Specialized efforts, such as these preliminary courses for student nurses, have already accomplished something directly and indirectly and are doing an immense amount of good, inasmuch as they have emphasized the necessity for similar education in all forms of work.

Thoroughness in any form of education must have its roots deep laid in the home, and we women have much to do with it there, and are answerable in a great measure for the present inefficiency, ignorance, indifference, and waste. For the souls of the little children are ours to begin with, "Marvellous delicate and tender things," says Olive Schreiner, "and keep forever the shadow that first falls upon them—that is, the mother's, or, at best, a woman's." The world requires not more children, but a better quality, not the waste products of human life that so many are to-day. But at the present there seems to be but little hope for that ideal education for the child in whom lies the world's welfare, for the home is one of the few institutions left that still keep the drawbridge up and refuse to let progress and improvement enter within their gates. The individual still regards his home as his castle in its most conservative sense, and still clings to old traditions, old systems, and time-honored cook-books, and refuses to come into line and be guided by association and combination, by economic laws and principles, and by the specializa-

tion of labor in its true sense which makes for thoroughness as no other way can.

But women cannot be held entirely responsible for the increasing difficult conditions in the household and for the wholesale lack of thoroughness within and without. Progress in many forms has taken out of it a great variety of work that was once done in the household by women, and the time formerly spent in these various duties has not been fully accounted for in other forms of activities. How long will it still be assumed about housekeepers, as it formerly was about nurses, that they are born and not made, and that the only essential required is to be a woman; that a taste and knowledge for all things domestic is hers by divine right; that she intuitively knows all about the care and bringing up of children, the laws of health, hygiene, sanitation, foods and their preparation, suitable clothing and furnishings? And yet such a groundless assumption leaves her at the mercy of two very unstable teachers, Instinct and Experience, the former sometimes lacking, and the latter at all times to be acquired at a great cost. So at the present moment we have the spectacle of each household trying to be a training-school unto itself in domestic affairs, wasting the time of both mistress and maid in vainly trying to teach and to do things without any adequate knowledge of underlying principles, busy making patients for the doctor and nurse by jeopardizing the health of families by their woful ignorance, and, later, themselves falling by the wayside a prey to worry and worn-out nerves.

Nor are these the least of the woes that befall the modern household through its want of proper organization, its old-time methods, and its modern dangers. The rapid accumulation of great wealth, and its consequent tendency to luxurious forms of living and ease, have brought us very near to that point in the order of social change when a large class of women are in danger of becoming useless supernumeraries without an excuse for existing and a menace to the nation. The average man of the day devotes his energies early and late to the making of money, economizing labor at all points to compass his purpose, only to end in pouring his wealth into the hands of a wife or children who expend it in such profusion and lavishness of ignorance as has made Americans stand for greater extravagance than perhaps any other civilized people.

Even a superficial consideration of the question, then, will readily show that the inefficiency of the trained nurse can justly be placed only where it belongs—in the lack of proper early education; and while the preliminary course of instruction for other reasons is excellent and will probably always exist, it is to be hoped that it will not always be necessary to devote so large a portion of the time to household economics. Any adequate remedy for the present state of affairs can only come through

a true education of our women. They must be trained, disciplined to bear their due share of the work needful for the helping of the nation; they must be taught that the true value of money lies not in the luxury it may heap about them, but in the opportunities it affords, and that the true joy of living can only be found in congenial work. It would be well if all appreciated the fact that the existing or faulty order must inevitably continue until our women of wealth, refinement, and intellectual attainments combine their talents, leisure, and intelligence to bring the home into its proper place in the economic and scientific world by the readjustment of household work and by creating the desire and the demand that our sons and daughters, children of all ranks and grades, should be given a proper education; that from the beginning there shall go hand-in-hand the teaching of their numberless faculties that shall make for a practical and proper appreciation of the principles of art, education, and labor, and the joy to be found in each. For then, and then only, can they understand what life means and know how to live. Moreover, the preparation must be such an one as shall be a fitting preliminary training for their future occupation in life, whether it be that of the trained nurse, the physician, the housekeeper, statesman, artist, or artisan, each one, whether man or woman, being prepared to fill their chosen niche, happy in having found it, and not, as now too often happens, being forced into occupations for which they often have neither the heart, head, nor hand.

Upon both men and women are we dependent for the first steps that shall establish and thoroughly equip professional schools for the investigation of all subjects pertaining to the household, and that shall offer suitable inducements only to such persons as have the proper attainments for carrying on such studies, after which we may look for the establishment of technical schools for children embracing all branches of work that in any manner touch the home. These schools should cover the country like a net-work, as do the public schools, and should coöperate with them; they too should have the authority of the law behind them, for which the rank and the file of the people have due respect. In such schools should the trained nurse find her proper place. With her more intimate knowledge of disease and its causes and the dangers that menace health, she is well fitted to be the teacher of home sanitation, hygiene, the personal laws of health, the true meaning of cleanliness, and the prevention of disease. Despite the fact that bacteriologists are every day throwing more light upon the causes of disease, and each city is equipped with its health officer, hospitals are still being multiplied in the land, the supply of trained nurses is not equal to the demand, and our wards are just as full of typhoid-fever patients as of

yore. These facts must sometimes make us pause to question if we are not spending our labor and strength for that which profiteth not. But thus it must be until the public at large and as individuals have acquired a practical, intelligent appreciation of the above subjects and of the duties of individuals and communities in the prevention of disease.

We need two orders of trained nurses, the new order of the coöperating health nurse with the old order for the sick, who must ever be with us. The appointment of a staff of trained nurses to the schools of New York by the Health Commission for the purpose of continuing the work in the public schools is the beginning of this new order, and is a hopeful sign of the times.

Graduates of to-day, we who are already of the guild greet you heartily and give you cordial welcome to your place among us. In your future work we see much of hope and promise. When you have grown a little older, and have had a more varied experience, you will realize that the mere care of the patient is the least part of your work compared with what you can and ought to do towards making the conditions that cause pain and sickness and all manner of suffering less possible.

In a recent issue of *THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING* Miss Dock says: "After one has worked for a time in healing wounds which should never have been inflicted, tending illness which should never have developed, sending patients to hospitals who need not have gone if their homes were habitable, bringing charitable aid to persons who would not have needed charity if health had not been ruined by unwholesome conditions, one loses heart and longs for preventive work, constructive work—something that will make it less easy for so many illnesses and accidents to occur, that will help to bring better homes and workshops, better conditions of life and labor." And this expressed longing finds its echo in the heart of each of us, who have learned by experience that the faithful nursing of the patient, the splendid work done in so many forms of philanthropy, and the efforts of religion do not reach the root of the matter. In your professional life you have learned that we may dress and nurse a wound ever so carefully, but that all our work represents time and energy expended in vain, that a breakdown of the wound is inevitable, did not the surgeon first clean and scrape away all the diseased tissues, reaching deep down into the fresh, healthy part, until no germ of disease was left to impair the growth of new, healthy flesh. And so it is with our work in caring for humanity in other ways—we are but staying a worse condition; perhaps, but not removing the cause, if we rest satisfied with mere treatment and do not direct our best energies towards prevention.

You are, therefore, to be congratulated in your choice of work.

You are entering a field of labor that is ever widening, and where each can make for herself a definite place in rendering such ideals of education as I have but haltingly tried to show you to-day practical facts. More especially are you to be congratulated in your choice of a school where the standard of excellence desired for its graduates is so clearly set forth, and where there is placed within the reach of pupils the possibility of that quality of thoroughness that is the great need and demand of the day.

THE OLD NURSE

By KATHERINE DE WITT

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So many innuendoes have of late been cast upon the old nurse that I feel an impulse to rise in her defence. Must she really think of herself as useless lumber? Does the law concerning the use of experience hold good in other walks of life and fail in ours? The woman who takes up teaching as her work often finds it difficult to get started. She must, as a rule, content herself with a humble position and a humble salary until she has proved her worth. Once started, her career is sure, if she be worthy. She advances steadily, gaining in knowledge at each step, and her age is crowned with honor. The woman physician, fresh from a medical school or, if she has been fortunate, from a hospital position, is glad to begin as an assistant to some one of her seniors who is well-established, and if she be worthy, she soon works into a position of her own. In both these cases, however, success depends upon ability and hard work. It is not to be denied that there are teachers who remain stationary in undesirable positions, or that there are physicians who fail to advance and who finally conclude that they have mistaken their calling and take up some other line of work.

In our own profession there seems to be no question in regard to the use of experience in hospital positions. The posts of greatest responsibility are, almost without exception, held by women who took their training years ago, who have gained wisdom with years, who are our leaders in thought and action. When one of these representative women gives up a post she has long held her absence seems a calamity, and it is long before anyone else can take up her duties as ably. The officers of an institution who are seeking to fill such a vacancy do not, as a rule, choose some member of the last graduating class, but someone who has already served well in some minor position, and who has demonstrated her ability to step up higher.